



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE MEN WHO MADE ISRAEL

GEORGE S. GOODSPEED
The University of Chicago

ABRAHAM AND THE FOREFATHERS OF ISRAEL

9. All nations that have achieved something in the world are wont to look back to their origins. America has its Pilgrim Fathers, England, its Anglo-Saxon ancestors. As time goes on, every detail in the experiences of these early heroes is lingered over lovingly, the meaning of their experiences magnified and interpreted in the light of later history. A peculiar love for this backward look is shown by ancient peoples. Although they followed their origins far behind the time when any written records existed, they had no lack of memories. Stories were handed down by word of mouth from family to family or from tribe to tribe, full of life and color, with definite details which in course of time took an organized form. Sometimes the nation was traced back to an individual founder, as Rome to Romulus. More frequently the origins of a nation were presented in the form of a genealogy, a single ancestor standing at the head of the line, the forefather of a tribe from which the nation sprang, which was thus of one blood. Thus Hellen was the common father of the Greek people, who called themselves the Hellenes. The various Greek tribes were related to their ancestor as branches from a common stem.

10. To this well-nigh universal custom Israel was no exception. It, too, was proud of its past, of which it preserved well-ordered recollections. Even when it could not write, it could remember, and these memories it preserved in the form of a family tree, the stem of which was the first great hero and forefather, Abraham. His descendants were the various peoples with which Israel's beginnings were connected in its memories. Their movements were events in the lives of these individual descendants. The whole presented a word-picture, in the form of personal experiences easily remembered and handed down, of the scene and the life out of which Israel grew into a separate people. When these biographies were written down in a period when

Israel had long been a nation, the prophets and priests who wrote them drew from them a rich store of instruction regarding Jehovah's relation to his people. It is in the use of these materials, preserved thus in a way common to all ancient nations, that Israel's memories are distinguished from those of any other people.

11. The story of Abraham begins, for Israel's tradition, with a critical moment in his life. He was the son of Terah, a descendant of Shem. Terah had been living in or near Ur, a famous old city of Babylonia, at the mouth of the Euphrates River, but for reasons unknown to us had migrated up the Euphrates to Haran, a city in the upper Mesopotamian valley. There he died, and two of his sons continued to abide there. Not so Abraham. God had another destiny for him. God promised him that, if he would follow the divine guidance in further journeying, he would have a career of wide influence and a mighty nation would grow from his descendants. Abraham was seventy-five years old, and had no children; yet he trusted the divine promise. He left his brethren, took his wife Sarah and his possessions, and, accompanied only by his nephew Lot, crossed the Euphrates and entered the unknown westland.

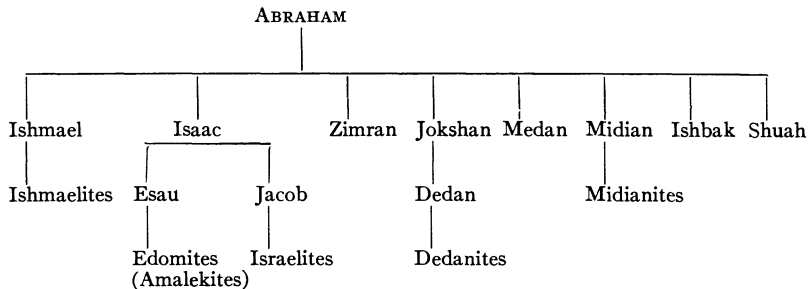
12. Our next glimpse of him is in Palestine. There he wanders up and down the western plateau, among the Canaanites who were settled there, building altars to Jehovah at Shechem and Bethel, and even entering Egypt. His nephew Lot left him to settle in the rich valley of the Jordan River. For Abraham it was enough that Jehovah again assured him that the highland of Palestine where he wandered would be the possession of his descendants. So he went on. He built an altar at Hebron. He won fame by a night attack on an army led by kings of Babylonia who had come to recover their authority over rebellious rulers of the land. Following this achievement came a new and more definite promise from Jehovah that a son should be born to him, whose descendants would rule over all Palestine from the Euphrates to Egypt.

13. Yet still the promise was not fulfilled, and Abraham, as the custom of his time was, begat a son by his wife's slave, Hagar. This was Ishmael, the ancestor of the tribes known as the Ishmaelites. He thought that thus the hope of posterity might be realized. Soon after Jehovah made a covenant with him, assuring him that not Ish-

mael, but a son born of Sarah, should realize the promise, and requiring of him as a sign of his acceptance of the covenant, that he should introduce the rite of circumcision. One year after, when he had reached the age of one hundred years, this son was born and named Isaac. Thereupon Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away and centered his hopes on Isaac.

14. Jehovah tested Abraham's faith yet again by requiring him to offer up Isaac as a burnt-sacrifice to him, as was a not uncommon custom at the time. Abraham obeyed; but just as he was about to slay his son preparatory to the burning, Jehovah intervened and supplied a ram as a substitute. He added a new assurance in the form of a solemn oath that the former promises should surely be fulfilled. When Isaac was of proper age, Abraham obtained for him a wife, Rebekah, from the descendants of his brethren in Mesopotamia. After this, at the age of one hundred and seventy-five years, Abraham died.

15. Other episodes of Abraham's life were preserved in tradition. On one occasion, when God determined to destroy the cities in which Lot dwelt, Abraham appealed to the divine mercy to save them, provided ten righteous were found there. These could not be found, and the cities perished, but Lot and his family were saved, and became the ancestors of the nations of Moab and Ammon. A characteristic account is given of Abraham's bargain with the children of Heth, the Hittites, for the purchase of the cave of Machpelah as a burial-place at the time of Sarah's death. Abraham himself married again a certain Keturah, and thus became the ancestor of many tribes of the Midianites. The following genealogical table illustrates the branches of Abraham's family.



16. The above table reveals clearly how Israel regarded itself as related to the people round about it. With the Canaanites and Amorites, who made up the bulk of the population, it was conscious of no close ties. The same was true of the Hittites. But the case was different with Moab and Ammon, and with the Midianite and Ishmaelite tribes of the Arabian desert. To them Israel recognized a special relation, and represented it by claiming with them a common descent from the family of Abraham. From these connections it seems possible to draw some conclusions as to the period in the history of the ancient world when Abraham lived. It is thought that the migration which brought the Canaanites and Amorites into Palestine began in the centuries shortly after 2500 B. C. As they were settled there in Abraham's day, he must have entered long after. The Hittites with whom Abraham dwelt in Palestine appeared in Syria about 1700 B. C. These facts suggest that Israel's recollections of Abraham take us back to the sixteenth century. But the kings of Babylonia whose army he defeated have been found to belong to a period long before; in fact, to the time when the Canaanites were just entering Palestine (2250 B. C.). Here is a difficulty which is not yet solved. What it means is that Israel's traditions did not clearly distinguish the time in which the events they narrated took place, and that the teachers who gathered and organized them were not concerned with such questions.

17. What interested these teachers was to show how Israel's destiny and character as a nation were determined in Abraham. He was Israel's forefather, not merely because the nation was descended from him, but chiefly because he received for Israel certain promises from Jehovah; and his spirit in acting upon them was an example for his descendants. (a) Through Abraham, Israel was selected by Jehovah from among the other peoples of the earth for a special career. It became a "chosen people," as the prophets said. A land was set apart for it—the land of Palestine. It was to be an empire extending far north and south, and other nations were to benefit from its rule. (b) This greatness was to come from doing as Abraham did—following where Jehovah led, obeying his word of command, having faith in him even when it seemed to invite disaster. This is

what is meant by the famous saying: "Abraham believed in Jehovah; and he reckoned it to him for righteousness."

18. Few nations have been so favored as was Israel in being able to count Abraham as its ancestor. To know that through him a splendid future was in store for it; to feel that the high task of being worthy of that future was laid upon it; and to strive to reach that future, not by vulgar straining after wealth or worldly power, but by obedience to God and trust in his guidance—this was Israel's fine outlook and inspiration. This was what Abraham meant to those who came after him; and by it he stands foremost among the men who made Israel.



HEBRON, THE REPUTED BURIAL PLACE OF ABRAHAM